

The Christian News-Letter

No. 199

Edited by
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DEAR MEMBER,

Though General Smuts in his address to the Empire Parliamentary Association just before he left England made it clear that he was expressing no dogmatic beliefs, but merely thinking aloud, his speech answered questions and crystallized ideas that were already in the minds of many. It thus gave a fresh direction to general thought and, perhaps, to the future course of events. This estimate of the importance of his speech does not imply agreement with everything that he said. In particular, while there is much to be said in general in favour of his plea for decentralizing the administration of the colonial empire and grouping the smaller territories in larger units, it is essential to guard against any changes which would have the effect of extending the South African attitude and policy towards the African races to other parts of the continent.

The point to which it seems desirable to call special attention at the moment is that he gave the support of his unrivalled experience to the view that the predominant power in world affairs is likely to rest for a long time to come in the hands of Russia, the United States and the British Commonwealth. In this trinity he finds the main stabilizing factor of the future, "the wall of power behind which the freedoms and the democracies of the world can be built up again."

NATIONAL GREATNESS

Historical destiny is not the result of conscious human contrivance, nor of the deliberate and clear choice of individuals or groups. But when destiny confronts us the vastest issues may hinge on the way in which we respond.

From the Christian point of view national greatness is a given fact. It is no special concern of the Christian to seek or pursue it. His ultimate loyalty is to a Kingdom that is not of this world. For him, "the glories of our blood and state are shadows, not substantial things."

But equally, the Christian has no interest in belittling or ignoring national greatness. It may fall to his lot as statesman or citizen through the faithful performance of his duties to foster its growth. It lays on him responsibilities which he has no right as a Christian to evade.

While national greatness is something objectively given, neither to be gloried in nor depreciated, it is a fact so large in the life of a people that religious education, if it is to maintain touch with life, cannot fail to take account of it. It is the business of the Church to foster an understanding of the obligations of power and a sensitiveness to its almost inevitable corrupting influence.

THE TRINITY OF GREAT POWERS

In each of the three great World Powers may be seen stirrings of the sense of historical destiny.

The consciousness of a messianic mission to mankind, which is characteristic of the Russian mind, may be expected to emerge in new forms and with a new intensity from the unparalleled historical experience through which the people of Russia have passed and from the astonishing achievements of the past two years.

A single illustration must serve for the United States. The Churches in that country have launched a National Mission on World Order. Mr. John Foster Dulles, the Chairman of the Commission of the Federal Council of Churches on a Just and Durable Peace (cf. C.N.-L. No. 179), has sent me a copy of his speech which opened the mission. He describes its purpose in these terms :—

“We seek to revive in our people a sense of destiny in the performance of a great work of creation. Upon the success of our efforts, with parallel efforts by others, depends the future of our nation. For we are at one of those critical periods that can readily mark the end of our greatness.”

The American nation, he reminds his hearers, has been a people of vision and self-confidence. Its founders conceived of their task as of world-wide import. They saw a great prospect and were filled with a great purpose. But the vision has faded; the nation no longer conceives of itself as creating for the benefit of mankind. Courage has ebbed, and fear has entered in. America has retired within itself and built barriers against the outside world. It has shrunk from responsibility in world affairs. It has failed to meet successfully the test of prosperity. It is in danger of losing its soul. The only way in which it can recover is to acknowledge a *divine* purpose that has to be obeyed, to seek first the Kingdom of God, to return to the wisdom of Christ. That alone will enable the American people “to embark, in company with others, on the next great adventure.”

THE BRITISH COMMONWEALTH

General Smuts in his recent speech described the British Commonwealth as “one of the greatest things of the world and of history.” No one has spoken more eloquently and convincingly about the uniqueness of this experiment in freedom than General Smuts, who has borne arms against Great Britain, suffered defeat at its hands, seen autonomy restored to the conquered South African republics, and is now the Prime Minister of a sovereign nation which is a willing partner in the British Commonwealth.

An unthinking pride in the British Empire and an unqualified justification of it are wholly unwarranted. Like all human structures it bears the stains of past wrongs and contains injustices waiting to be redressed. But it is equally shallow to belittle the significance of the achievement it represents. At a time when throughout a great part of the world the foundations of social order have been almost completely destroyed, the existence of the British Commonwealth is a fact the importance of which cannot be exaggerated. It provides, in the region not of ideals but of actual achievement, an example of an association

of free and equal nations and of an empire in which the advance of the dependent peoples to self-government is the acknowledged goal. There is plenty of room for debate about the speed, vigour and adequacy of the measures for the attainment of that goal. But, if we rate the slow gains of solid achievement above high-sounding phrases and airy aspirations, we shall not make the disastrous mistake of underestimating the value of the foundations that have already been laid. We shall give proper weight, for example, to the new step taken during the war, by which British taxpayers have undertaken to provide substantial sums for the social betterment of dependent peoples. The reality of the British Commonwealth and of the British imperial tradition, as expounded by leading statesmen and administrators from Burke to Lugard, imposes immense obligations on those who are its heirs.

THE EQUIPMENT OF OUR YOUTH

For the discharge of these obligations and the fulfilment of whatever historic destiny lies in the purpose of God for our people, one task has precedence of all others—to equip succeeding generations to bear the responsibilities that will rest on them. The Education Bill, as the Christian News-Letter has insisted, and will continue to insist, is the acid test of our understanding of our national vocation.

But when we have made statutory provision to bring to an end the present disastrous wastage of human lives and to create real opportunity for all, the question remains what we are going to teach the coming generations about their obligations to their country, to mankind and to God. The question cannot be answered except in the light of ultimate ends, and it leads directly to theology. Its practical importance is brought forcibly before us in the following letter from the headmistress of an evacuated girls' school:—

“A recent review of D. R. Davies's last book encourages me to do something I haven't done before—to write and ask for your help. I think there must be other people who, like myself, find the D. R. Davies school of history and theology not only depressing (which may be quite a good thing), but purely destructive with no constructive side to it. In *Down Peacock's Feathers* it seems that anything that men do for their fellows, in any field of service, impelled by love or compassion or by some ideal beyond themselves, will only make things worse. The better the world we make for man to live in, the better education we give him, the more opportunities he has of developing what is in him, the more likely he is to go on trying to live without God in that pride which is his inheritance of 'original sin.' So our good becomes, as it were, evil, and its only purpose might be to permit the final crash of man's life and civilization to come a bit more quickly. It's all so intellectually brilliant. But is there nothing we can do, except try to turn to God ourselves—and leave people in slums, and children in classes of sixty, and so on—because it is futile to do anything about it, since history proves that man's best efforts only produce the worst results? My sixth form here is desperately keen on the Beveridge Report and the White Paper on Education and the replanning of London, and so on. Am I to encourage them to go on thinking and discussing? If D. R. Davies's interpretation is correct and complete, it seems a bit insincere. I'm just wondering what he would do with a sixth form current events

group, if he had one. And when it comes to discussing 'futures'—if there's no point in trying to do anything about *this* world, why choose a hard life and a poor salary?"

THE CHALLENGE TO THEOLOGY

Against the background sketched in this Supplement, how evident is the need, and how exciting the endeavour, to rediscover in its rich fullness the Christian truth about man—a truth that is at present fragmented among a variety of contending doctrines, secular and Christian, each of which is content to assert one part in isolation from the whole.

We have to begin by recovering an understanding of man as having his distinct and unique place in creation—not animal, nor angel, nor god, but *man*, and by learning again to see him, as Pascal and the writers of the Bible saw him, in both his greatness and his littleness, his grandeur and his misery, holding both truths together in their terrific tension.

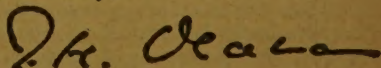
We need the help of Christian theologians, philosophers, poets, sociologists, anthropologists and psychologists to show us man's rootedness in nature and history, played upon by "sub-conscious egoisms, interests, deceptions and determinations," and at the same time to rescue him from the various naturalistic theories that would imprison him wholly in nature and the animal world, depriving him of spiritual significance and dignity.

We have to break with the humanist tradition, so powerful in education, which conceives of man primarily as an individual, seeking to unfold and realize the infinite potentialities of his "personality," and learn to think of him as a *person*, existing only in relation to other persons, and bounded and limited by God and neighbour.

Above all, we have to recover the knowledge of his essential nature as having *his being in the Word of God*, existing as man through his capacity to hear a word addressed to him by God, to respond to an unconditional demand. To be commissioned by God is to be the bearer of an unconquerable hope. Here is found a source of confidence that will outlast the enthusiasms evoked by the intoxicating belief in man's capacity to make his own history.

In all these directions lie real and great adventures.

Yours sincerely,



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THE FUTURE OF EUROPE

The last News-Letter included a long extract from a letter from an exceptionally well-informed correspondent on the continent, which gave a disquieting account of the legacy of totalitarianism and total war in Europe. In this Supplement we reproduce the greater part of the rest of the letter, which relates to the outlook for the future. The letter was written at the end of September.

Is there then nothing left in Europe on which we can build? Thank God there is. Totalitarianism and total warfare are directly forces of destruction, but they are indirectly forces of *purification*. While their effect on the many is to mould them into undifferentiated masses, their effect on the few is to strengthen them and bring out their real qualities.

SURVIVING CENTRES OF VITALITY

In thinking of the future of Europe we must, therefore, concentrate our attention on the vital *minorities*, the groups that have shown by their direct or indirect resistance that they had substantial things to fight for.

We must distinguish here between the totalitarian countries and the occupied countries. In Germany and Italy there has been little direct and open resistance. The process of mass-formation is, therefore, far more acute in those countries than in all others. Here more than anywhere else the groups to count on for the future are minority groups. To expect any strong, positive and constructive reactions from the frightened and terrorized masses of those countries is an illusion. They have lost not only all political orientation, but all sense of direction in general. Yet even in those countries there has been resistance, mostly secret, but nevertheless active. There are men and women in Germany who have risked their lives in order to fight Nazism, and there are groups which, while not resisting directly, have remained inwardly free. In the light of much evidence collected not merely during the last few months, but during the whole period of the war, it can be said that there are in particular three groups on whom one can count for the building of a new Europe.

First, there are the groups of *active* opposition. These have their adherents in different classes of the population: government officials, trade union leaders, churchmen, officers. Those who have shown by their acts, often at great risk, that they were fundamentally opposed to Nazism and have fought it even at the time of its greatest successes, have earned the right to take part in the reconstruction of their country and of Europe.

In the second place come the remnants of the workers' organizations, which stand for democracy and fight, therefore, against Nazi tyranny and also against a revolution for revolution's sake. These constructive groups of workers have to-day a hard stand, since the

natural tendency of the masses is toward a purely destructive type of revolution. But they are by no means insignificant and may yet play a considerable rôle if they get their opportunity.

The third group is the Churches. It is not merely the opinion of churchmen but of many outside the Churches, that the Churches have proved through the years of totalitarianism that they have a great task to fulfil in the national life. The Churches in Germany have not spoken as clearly and as often as they should have spoken, and they have in certain situations compromised with Nazism. But the direct resistance of some, and the indirect resistance of many, churchmen has nevertheless been one of the strongest defences against totalitarianism. At the same time, the Churches have learned a great deal though these years. They have discovered that the Church has a mission to fulfil in relation to public life; they have recognized that there is no such thing as the autonomy of politics or of economics, and they have worked hard to lay the foundation for a Church of the future which will be at once more independent from the world and more truly serving the nation as a whole.

These groups realize with increasing clarity that they must convince the world by their acts that they can really be trusted. They are aware that their first task is to clean up their country by the total elimination of Nazism and the severe punishment of all responsible Nazi-leaders and their accomplices.

In the occupied countries the situation is different, since the process of destruction has not gone as far. The period of totalitarian rule has not been so long and the resistance has been more widespread and more effective. But that does not mean that they can simply begin again at the point where they were at the moment of occupation. Total war has hit them too. Much of their national strength has been destroyed. Many of their best leaders have been killed or lost their health. Life has been disrupted. The disintegration of society and of the family has taken alarming proportions. Moral disorientation is quite general, especially among youth.

But in their case the "remnant" is a wider group. Here again the resisters come first. Not all who have resisted can be considered as constructive elements of the future; some in the process of resisting have lost sight of the deeper reasons for their resistance and simply taken over Nazi practices and Nazi methods. The true resisters on whom we can count are those who have steadfastly kept the end in view and subordinated the means to that end.

Secondly, there are the political and social groups which have succeeded in maintaining some cohesion in spite of Nazi pressure. These differ from country to country, but it would seem that in all occupied countries there are at least some political groups, some organizations of workers and some professional bodies which will come out of the war even stronger than before.

Thirdly, there are the Churches. Here again there are differences. But the following statement made by a leading underground paper in Holland applies to some extent in all these countries: "One of the many miracles of these years is the discovery made by so many that the Church is the conscience of the nation." The Churches in these

countries will, therefore, have a quite exceptional opportunity, and signs are not wanting that they are aware of this and are getting ready to speak their word at the time of reconstruction.

LOOKING WESTWARD

In this situation much depends on the message which continental Europe hears from the West, that is, from the Anglo-Saxon nations and from the exiled governments in London. Never before has the continent been as dependent on that message. Never before have so many Europeans, not only in the occupied countries but also in Germany and Italy, been so eagerly listening to every word of hope that comes from that quarter.

But do they hear a clear message concerning a more just and more peaceful world and a definite call to prepare for such a world? Are the Anglo-Saxon nations holding out a concrete hope for the despairing masses, and do they stand ready to fill the vacuum left by totalitarianism?

At times it has seemed that the message was coming. The Atlantic Charter, the freedoms of Roosevelt, the Beveridge Plan, certain statements of allied statesmen and last, not least, the utterances of the British and American Churches (very particularly those of the Archbishop of Canterbury), have found a great echo on the continent. But on the whole the message from the West has been lacking in concreteness and consistency. It has not been translated into definite proposals which can strike the imagination of the masses. In Europe to-day most relevant groups and persons are ready for radical solutions both in the political and in the social fields. But they feel uncertain whether the Anglo-Saxon nations are ready to support such solutions or leave unchanged the situation out of which the war has grown. The inability of the West to find a word which can crystallize the positive forces in Europe creates a certain amount of disillusionment in the occupied countries. It would be a tragedy if Europe should turn its back on the Western world.

THE RIDDLE OF THE EAST

It is not difficult to understand that millions in Europe are fascinated by Russia. The astonishing vitality of the Russian people, the extraordinary sacrifices which they make for the common cause, the remarkable unity which they show, the independence and skill of their foreign policy and propaganda, the impression made by Russian prisoners of war and Russian workers, all these things have helped to change the mental picture which continental Europeans had of "bolshivism." No propaganda is powerful enough to succeed against such facts.

The fascination is perhaps increased by the mystery which surrounds Russia. The dialectical tension and the contradictions in the Soviet policy baffle anyone who tries to understand it, and make it almost impossible to arrive at a balanced judgment about the real significance of Russia's rôle in the present and in the future.

But however complicated the Russian situation may be, for the proletarianized masses it represents something very simple: namely, a working alternative to their present slavery. For them Russia becomes increasingly the country which offers what they want most: liberty and social justice.

This is true in the occupied countries, where communism plays a great rôle in the resistance movement. It is becoming increasingly true in Germany, where the process of proletarianization is going on at a terrifying speed and where the policy of an understanding with Russia is making headway, especially, but not exclusively, in the army. Russian propaganda is making very clever use of this mood. The promises which it makes seem far more concrete than anything which comes from the West. The possibility of a landslide towards the East would not be a great danger, if it were certain that Russia will be a constructive element in the European situation. But this is by no means certain. If Russia is left alone in Europe, the temptation to dominate and exploit the situation will be strong. For the sake of the future it is essential that the Russian way-out should not become the only way-out.

But there is more. The turning of the proletarian masses toward Russia is not merely based on their desire for social justice, but also on their despair. Their interest in Russia is to a large extent their interest in the overthrowing of all remnants of the traditional social and political order. It is clear that radical changes must take place in that order; but they should take place on the basis of the fundamental European tradition which is Christian and, therefore, personalistic and anti-totalitarian. For Europe as a whole to adopt the solution which these masses consider as the Russian solution would be to commit suicide.

WHAT EUROPE NEEDS

Europe needs above all a revival of Christian faith. The task of re-christianizing Europe is the task of the European Churches themselves. After these years of judgment and purification they are better able to perform it than they have been for a long time.

Europe needs also a clear lead concerning the reconstruction of its political and social life. In this it will necessarily be far more dependent on the victorious nations. For the time is past when the continent could build up its own order irrespective of the attitude of the Anglo-Saxon world and Russia, and the decisions of these powers will in any case create the economic and international framework in which the continent will have to live.

The European countries, therefore, expect a lead to be given by the victorious nations. They want that lead at once in order to know for what world they are to prepare themselves and to counteract the nihilistic and anarchistic tendencies in their midst.

The lead which they need is a clear alternative to the mass-solutions. Even more than bread and peace they need *hope*. Hope can only be given to them if it is shown that a serious attempt is being made to create a world in which there will be freedom and security, a world in which they will not be mere pawns in a struggle for power or merely the victims of a system of production.

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